

## Day Two: Standoff at the Khyber Pass

Our day began with the sound of sunrise prayers rising over the morning fog of the ancient border city of Peshawar, Pakistan. Driving through the staggering poverty of this city, which included refugee camps of mud-brick buildings that were home to some 50,000 Afghan refugees, we came to the splendor of the residence of the regional governor. This opulent white mansion was a left over from British colonial rule and was surrounded by hundreds of guards who snapped to attention as our motorcade sped by.

Governor Shah received us with candor and grace and spoke of the challenges that he faced in the governance of the tribal areas of northern Pakistan. His military staff briefed us on military operations in Waziristan which resulted in the capture or death of hundreds of terrorists along with over 200 Pakistan military casualties. At the close of our meeting, I spoke to the governor about the fact that the television crew traveling with us had been denied access to the tribal areas that we would visit later in the day. Governor Shah assured me that he would “give the green light” to our entire delegation, including the television crew...famous last words.

We drove in our motorcade of military vehicles and Suburbans to the border of the tribal areas. Fifteen miles south of the historic Khyber Pass our journey almost came to an end.

Despite our assurances from the governor, the border personnel refused to clear us through with the embedded media. That is where the standoff began. As hundreds of locals gathered at this squalid intersection of abject poverty, our diplomatic staff talked and the border guards talked and we sat. More military showed up along with lots more spectators.

The diplomatic staff asked me if I would be willing to allow our delegation to proceed through the checkpoint while they remained with the media but I had no peace about that. I was sure that the governor had given us the go ahead and I was sure that if we left part of our group behind that they would never make the crossing. When encouraged to pass without them, we respectfully informed the guards that we were “willing to wait for the governor to call.”

An anxious hour passed and the cell phone rang with Governor Shah on the line. We were quickly escorted into the tribal areas with our entire group, as we drove past a sign that read, “Entry of foreigners is not permitted beyond this point.”

The rest of our day was inspiring but much less dramatic. We helped lay bricks at a new school being built with US tax dollars and were greeted warmly by faculty and children in the far-flung tribal region. We ended the day at the garrison of the famed Khyber Rifles, the security force for the Khyber Pass. As the pictures on the headquarters wall attested, we had been preceded to this place by presidents and kings and conquerors. I will never forget this day or the good and decent people of the tribal areas of Pakistan that we met after the standoff at Khyber Pass.

- Rep. Mike Pence, Islamabad, Pakistan